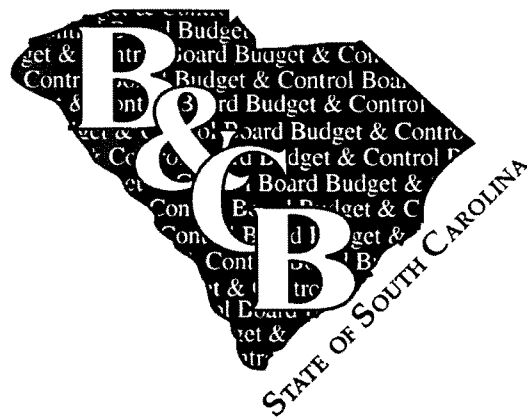
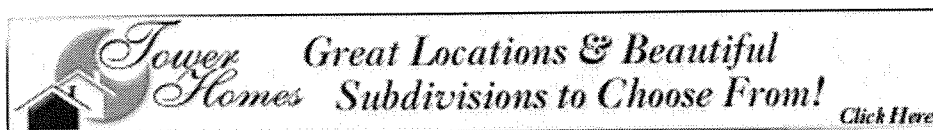


December 1, 2003

State Government News Summary



**Prepared by the Budget and Control Board
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Tax breaks need review

Posted Monday, December 1, 2003 - 2:22 am

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The Legislature needs to consider changes to laws allowing economic incentives to ensure taxpayers aren't hurt.

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Economic development incentives are needed in South Carolina to help counties attract and retain manufacturing companies that

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generally increase wages in an area and spawn other businesses. But a comprehensive study shows that laws creating such incentives have serious loopholes in reporting requirements and have been watered down to the point that it's fair to question whether such tax breaks accomplish the original purpose.

Tax incentives are important because they help attract industries to our state that could locate anywhere. Used correctly, tax breaks can help lure much-courted companies to a state that needs high-paying jobs.

The study, commissioned by the Greenville Alliance for Quality Education, was prepared by Columbia economist Harry Miley, who looked specifically into the tax breaks given out by Greenville County Council. Miley was an economic adviser to former Gov. Carroll Campbell, and he helped write the 1987 law that created a plum tax incentive called FILOTs, which are fees in lieu of taxes.

Used incorrectly, tax incentives can have a negative impact on several groups. The incentives can take money from local schools or other governmental entities that must deal with the consequences of growth. And inappropriate or too generous tax incentives can shift a heavy tax load onto other taxpayers, such as homeowners and other businesses that don't have those special breaks.

The Miley study had some words of praise for the Greenville County Council. It was noted that the County Council has a formula for distributing revenue on a pro rata basis with other tax districts, including the Greenville County School District. And unlike many counties, Greenville County doesn't deduct "expenses" for purposes such as infrastructure improvements for multi-county industrial parks before any distribution is made, and that voluntary act allows more money to be distributed to other tax districts.

The study said Greenville County "should be commended" for having a set of investment guidelines that are used in granting incentives. And the report noted Greenville County does a "better than average job" of collecting and maintaining data about agreements involving incentives.

So, the Greenville County Council clearly is doing better than many of its counterparts across the state in implementing state laws governing several forms of tax incentives. There's room for improvement, and the study contained six recommendations that should be taken seriously — such as increasing the requirements for giving some tax

incentives and establishing a rigorous reporting and monitoring system.

Miley's recommendations were to Greenville officials, but his report should get the attention of the state Legislature. Miley exposed some glaring deficiencies in state law that can only be corrected in the Legislature.

The Legislature really is responsible for critically needed reforms. Legislators are responsible for the laws that as currently written do not require much-needed transparency in local economic incentive deals. The state should set the requirements for reporting these deals and maintaining a database accessible to the general public.

Of even greater urgency, the Legislature should review the ridiculously low thresholds for some of these incentives. For example, companies had to invest at least \$85 million in the late 1980s to qualify for a FILOT agreement but that threshold has dropped to as little as \$5 million. And tax credits once reserved for manufacturing companies are now being granted to commercial shopping centers, corporate headquarters and speculative office buildings, according to the Miley study.

Where once such special tax breaks were reserved for "footloose" manufacturing plants that might go anywhere "but for" these lower taxes, these economic development incentives are being handed out across South Carolina to companies that likely would locate here without such special tax treatment.

Across South Carolina, property taxes are being shifted to other classes of taxpayers at least in part because economic incentives have not remained true to their original purpose. And in many counties, local school districts are being deprived of critically needed tax revenue.

Reviewing and changing these special tax incentives should be at the top of the Legislature's long to-do list next year.



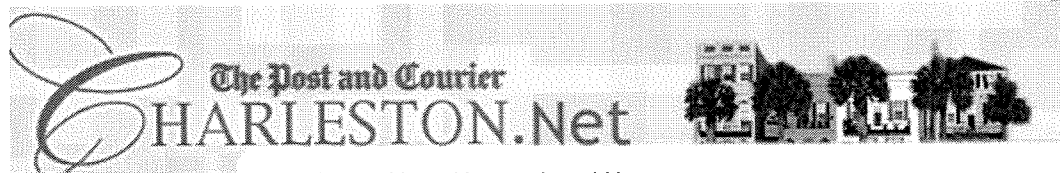
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Story last updated at 7:12 a.m. Monday, December 1, 2003

Tiniest babies, greatest demands

State rates high in premature births amid rising cost of high-tech care

BY LYNNE LANGLEY
 Of The Post and Courier

Just 25 weeks into her pregnancy, Kanya Hammond gave birth to a 1 pound, 5 ounce baby girl. "I cried for a good 30 minutes. Then I started praying," Hammond said.

The Mount Pleasant resident hardly got a glimpse of tiny Ky'Arah before an ambulance rushed the baby across town to a neonatal intensive care unit at the Medical University of South Carolina.

The phone rang in the hospital room where Hammond was recovering after the birth. "They said she is not going to make it." Her baby's heart had stopped once, and her lungs were not developed. They said to come right away.

Hammond could barely see her baby through the Isolette incubator and maze of lines that connected Ky'Arah to machines. They blinked red numbers, moved in jagged graphs of green and blue and white, pinged and beeped to signal problems and summon nurses.

"It was scary looking at her through the glass. So many cords and tubes," Hammond said.

After five weeks and two days, the baby had gained 13 ounces and come off a ventilator. Her eyes had opened, and Hammond had heard her cry for the first time.

She hopes her first child will celebrate Christmas at home, two weeks before her Jan. 8 due date.

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More and smaller very premature babies now survive, but the cost of the necessary high-tech care continually grows.

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In South Carolina, which has the third-highest rate in the nation of premature births, the cost of caring for these babies has been \$72 million more per year in hospital bills alone than if the babies had been born at full term, according to a recently study by Charleston epidemiologist Dr. Thomas C. Hulsey.

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Each survivor has needed, on average, 56 days in the hospital compared with two days for a full-term baby.

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Very low-weight babies who survive represent 1.3 percent of the births in this state but 45 percent of hospital charges for newborns and 25 percent of all the days that newborn babies spend in hospitals, Hulsey found.

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"They have the greatest demand for medical care and health care resources," he said. "These very fragile newborns represent a small percentage of births (but have) a tremendous impact on the health care system."



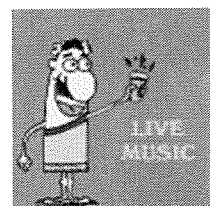
SAVING THE TINIEST BABIES

As Hammond held her baby to her chest, the machines monitoring Ky'Arah in the MUSC neonatal unit fell silent. Called kangaroo care, this careful cradling lets Ky'Arah smell her mother, hear her heartbeat and listen as her mother softly sings church songs.



"There is no substitute for parents," said Lesley McClure, Ky'Arah's primary nurse, who watches the baby and readouts continually. In mother's arms, a very low birth-weight baby stays warmer, maintains more oxygen in her blood and gains more weight, McClure said.

"She loves it right here on my chest," said Hammond, who cradles her baby for one to three hours at a stretch every day.



Ky'Arah's future looks bright now. As a baby in the neonatal intensive care unit, however, she faces hurdles, particularly with her underdeveloped lungs, said MUSC attending neonatologist Dr. Carol Wagner.

"They are basically fetuses out of the womb," Wagner said. "Each organ system is immature and at risk. The main organ we try to preserve is the brain. Sometimes it is a lost cause."

Only one in 20 to 30 babies born at 23 to 24 weeks' gestation will survive, she said. Weighing just 1 to 1??? pounds and about 12 inches long, these patients spend four to six months in the hospital.

At 25 weeks, about 40 percent won't live, while 90 percent make it at 28 weeks and need only six to seven weeks in the hospital.

Survival rates have improved significantly in the past five years

with better ventilators, tiny tubes, the drug surfactant that helps underdeveloped lungs expand and contract, better nutrition and more knowledge of how babies develop, Wagner said.

"It's a very complex type of medicine," she said.

A fellow MUSC neonatologist calls it Ritz Carleton care in a Red Roof Inn, a unit that looks jammed when it has a full count of 46 babies plus parents and staff.

Just the night before Wagner lost a neonate who had been through innumerable problems and was doing much better until infections overwhelmed the baby.

That same evening, a baby went home after eight months under McClure's care.

LIFELONG COSTS

The bills don't stop when a very premature baby leaves the hospital, Wagner, Hulsey and other experts said.

More than half have serious physical disabilities, and most have some kind of learning disability, Wagner said.

Areas of the brain do not develop normally, which may lead to limited mobility, visual or spatial problems, difficulty with speech, and other problems not seen until the child reaches age 2 or older and needs therapy.

"You grow into your brain problems," Wagner said.

The disabilities and illnesses also could include developmental delays, chronic medical conditions, poor school performance, mental and growth retardation, cerebral palsy, seizures, vision and hearing impairment, Hulsey said.

As they grow, these babies have higher rates of abuse and neglect and behavioral and psychiatric problems. They often repeat grades, require special education, are less likely to graduate from high school and are more likely to earn less money, Hulsey found. They also are more dependent on social welfare and more likely to become incarcerated, he said.

"It is not unreasonable to estimate that any society with a large and persistent low birth rate will also be characterized as having greater poverty, poorer child and adolescent health status, poorer school performance and higher rates of associated adult health problems," Hulsey reported.

As adults, these babies also have higher rates of diabetes, heart disease and hypertension, Hulsey and Wagner said.

"Are we saving babies who are more impaired? Are we creating long-term problems, children who are devastated?" Wagner wondered.

"You go into the field (neonatology) wanting to help and wanting to give each baby a chance at a normal life. We do not always succeed," Wagner said, "but sometimes we do."

IN SEARCH OF A CAUSE

As rates and numbers of very premature babies rise across the state and nation, causes remain elusive.

"We have made great strides in access to prenatal care, but we have no progress in reducing the (low birth-weight) problem," Hulsey said.

"As good as prenatal care is, it is not a substitute for being healthy before pregnancy," said Luanne Miles, the director of the Division of Perinatal Systems at the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Several factors are thought to contribute to the problem, Miles said. They include a mother who weighs too little when she becomes pregnant, whose nutrition is poor, or who uses drugs or alcohol during pregnancy.

Smoking contributes to 20 percent to 30 percent of all low birth-weight deliveries nationwide, she said.

Reports also link obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure to low-weight births, Miles said. South Carolina ranks in the top three states nationwide in diabetes and high blood pressure.

Risk rises among adolescents and women who have closely spaced babies, periodontal disease or sexually transmitted diseases, Wagner said.

In this state, black women and women on Medicaid are at increased risk for having very low and low birth-weight babies, Hulsey found.

"The thought now is it is not one risk factor but several," he said. "There is not going to be a magic bullet to fix the problem."

A REASON FOR THANKSGIVING

James and Sherece Regenor recently took Amelia Caroline home to Mount Pleasant after 150 days in the neonatal intensive care unit.

"They said she had a 50-50 shot of making it through the first day," said James Regenor, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force.

The couple hadn't even told most of their friends and family about the pregnancy when doctors said the baby needed to be delivered immediately, at 24 weeks and five days' gestation, for the health of mother and child.

Amelia arrived May 20, months before her Sept. 1 due date. She

weighed 1 pound, 3 ounces. A wedding ring could fit over her arms or legs, and her eyelids were fused.

"Nothing prepares you for something that tiny," her father said. Comparing Amelia to a full-term baby would be like comparing a 1-year-old to Shaquille O'Neal, he said.

"It was like an emotional roller coaster ride in there," her mother said. "I don't think the normal human can fathom what you go through. It's two steps forward and one giant step back. Sometimes you are spinning, and it doesn't stop ... One day you might get one good piece of information, but by 5 p.m. that goes south."

Amelia was born with severe lung problems and a Vitamin B deficiency. She developed five infections including fungal pneumonia. Nine intravenous lines ran into the baby at the same time.

"I told the doctor, 'We want to die trying, not try dying.' I wanted action," James Regenor said of the first most critical lung problem. "They took action, and she turned around."

To his knowledge, no other baby at MUSC has ever received 11 doses of surfactant, the drug that saves so many preemies.

"Amelia would have died at Day 5 without it. We understood the risks and asked Dr. Wagner to do it," he said. "We were consumed by it. I was obsessed by it and read (medical articles) every day."

Wagner described James Regenor as phenomenal.

"Some parents don't want all the information," she said. "It scares them. Others find reassurance in knowledge."

The baby was dying, but she had no sign of brain injury, Wagner said. Some of her colleagues disagreed, she said, but she followed the parents' requests.

Amelia stayed in an area, or pod, that could hold four very premature babies.

"Many days we did not see the same babies who were there before," James Regenor said. "It rips you apart. You know you could be next."

Amelia had severe infections, and doctors used a new combination of drugs that had not been tried, he said. His daughter rallied.

"You look at the machines for hours and hours. You think you'll go insane ... What kept us going was Amelia's tremendous resilience. She kept bouncing back," he said.

"She could always grasp our fingers," Sherece Regenor said. "We'd go in and sing to her, talk to her, pray with her."

Nine-year-old son Keaton would read to Amelia as she lay in the Isolette that the family called "the glass castle." The parents slept with clothing for Amelia then took the garments to her so she would bond with them and their scent.

Finally Amelia reached 7 pounds, 6 ounces. She went home Oct. 11. She's still on supplemental oxygen, receives occupational therapy and is vulnerable to infections. While James Regenor works, his wife and their son run errands. She orders groceries by phone, for instance, gives Keaton the check and waits in the car with Amelia while he runs into the store.

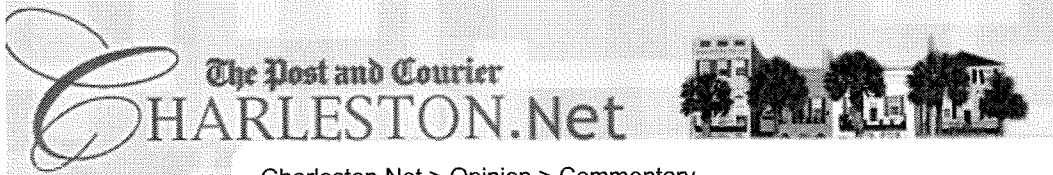
Amelia is doing well and seems perfectly normal, mother and father said, although they know premature babies are at risk for physical and developmental problems.

"She's a miracle. I won the lottery," James Regenor said.

With all that Amelia has survived, he's convinced "she's going to make a contribution. She'll have an impact somehow."

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Story last updated at 7:11 a.m. Monday, December 1, 2003

'Rampant' school choice could hinder student equality

BY THE REV. JOSEPH DARBY

I was pleased to read that the Rev. Joseph A. Delaine, Levi Pearson, Harry Briggs and Eliza Briggs were chosen as posthumous recipients of the Congressional Gold Medal, our nation's highest civilian honor. Those four brave citizens were among the 20 plaintiffs in the Briggs vs. Elliott case in Clarendon County, one of the four lawsuits combined and heard by the U.S. Supreme Court as Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. That lawsuit led to the eradication of what used to be called "separate but equal" schools in the South. Those four brave citizens gained a landmark victory but paid a considerable price. The Rev. Delaine was run out of South Carolina after threats against his life, Mr. and Mrs. Briggs lost their jobs, and Mr. Pearson lost his bank credit and the white customers for his timber business.

Their story is a painful chapter in South Carolina's history, but it's worth remembering. It's also worth remembering that the Supreme Court ruling did not lead to immediate desegregation of South Carolina's public schools. The 15 years following the decision saw many new private schools spring up as a segregated alternative to public schools, and also saw numerous strategies employed to avoid public school desegregation.

One of the primary strategies was "freedom of choice," an effort in some communities to do away with school zoning and to let parents "choose" the schools their children would attend. I remember that effort and the accompanying rhetoric, for the effort reached its peak when I was a high school student. The political powers that be praised "freedom of choice" and made it plain that they expected few white parents to send their children to predominately African-American public schools.

I thought of the plaintiffs in Briggs vs. Elliott and of the "freedom of choice" days in South Carolina as I read the lead editorial Wednesday. It noted that over 100 parents spent up to 12 hours

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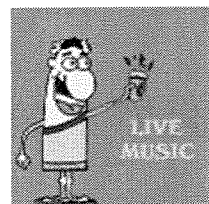
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in line, some staying overnight, trying to enroll their children in the St. Andrew's School of Math and Science. The editorial lauded their effort as an example of the forward momentum of school choice. I join in commending those parents and all parents who are involved in their children's schools and demand the best public education for their children. I also hope, however, that school choice remains a limited alternative at best.

Those parents who spent the night in line made a strong statement. I wonder, however, how many other parents would have also been in line but have jobs that don't allow them time off or would face considerable difficulty providing transportation for their children or lack the economic means to make such a choice viable? Many parents have no choice but to send their children to their zoned schools, and all possible steps should be taken to see that those schools are also excellent public schools. Rampant school choice can hinder that effort, because parents most often able to exercise and afford choice are often also the most involved and most demanding of their children. Rampant school choice also opens doors for students who show the most visible promise, but sometimes discourages or brings discomfort to children perceived as less promising.

School choice taken to its extreme can create a wide and ugly gap between schools that attract families of means and the most promising students and schools where children of modest means who are labeled as "low achievers" have little choice but to attend their zoned schools. While the editorial praises school choice for injecting "much-needed competition into the educational marketplace," it should be understood that the "market" can be fickle and not always beneficial to our children's well-being. Forcing schools with different populations and resources to compete on the same "playing field" is like forcing a Class A high school football team to prove its worth against an NFL team, and usually yields the same predictable result. "Good" schools get better, and "challenged" schools often languish. The "market" concept also clearly shows that business decisions are often made on "bottom line" subjective judgment. That's why bank branches are most often found near affluent communities, while check-cashing outlets are most often found near communities of modest means. We cannot afford rampant school choice that allows our children to be treated as commodities.

During the days of "freedom of choice," my mother chose, as did many parents, to send me to my zoned high school. The result was a diverse school population with some very able students and some struggling students. The unintended but visible benefit was that the very able students "raised the bar" for their struggling peers and led some students to achieve who would today be written off as "low achievers." That's public education at its best -- encouraging all children to achieve, seeing that every school has its share of achievers, and equipping all schools to succeed.

"Choice" is a reality and has been for some time. I would hope, however, that rampant choice does not create a new separate and unequal system of schools, and that area school boards and administrators will work to make choice obsolete by demanding and creating a climate of excellence in every public school. If that's not done, then "choice" today will be little more than

"freedom of choice" was in the late sixties and early seventies -- a very bad and bigoted idea that fosters inequity and seeks to leave a lot of children behind.

The Rev. Joseph A. Darby is senior pastor of Morris Brown AME Church and first vice president of the state NAACP.

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Posted on Mon, Dec. 01, 2003

Golden Cars plan to save state silver

S.C.-owned vehicles to be kept running well beyond 100,000 miles

By VALERIE BAUERLEIN
Staff Writer

South Carolina predicts it can save \$2.5 million or more a year if agencies keep state cars and vans on the road beyond their traditional life of about 100,000 miles.

The State Budget and Control Board has created a new program called Golden Cars.

Starting Jan. 1, agencies will pay discounted rates to lease high-mileage cars from the state fleet.

Some agencies cannot wait for the chance, given the state's tight budget.

The Department of Revenue was the first to sign up for Golden Cars. That department has seen its budget cut by more than a third in three years, and its number of employees fall from a high of 800 to 535 today.

"We're not that much into creature comfort," Revenue spokesman Danny Brazell said.

The department spends \$82,000 a year now leasing 11 Tauruses and two vans from the fleet. The plan is to turn in three of the Tauruses and one van in exchange for some of the older cars.

The savings would be about \$12,000 a year.

"If it works out well, we may look into even more cars," Brazell said.

The state owns about 18,000 vehicles, including school buses at the Department of Education, heavy equipment at the Department of Transportation and patrol cars for the Department of Public Safety.

The program would affect about 1,800 of those vehicles, the ones controlled by the S.C. Budget and Control Board's Fleet Management office.

Those cars and vans are leased out to more than 50 agencies on a long-term basis. A big client is the Department of Social Services, which leases 653 vehicles for its social workers and other employees in the field. Smaller clients include the Department of Archives and History, with eight cars.

The Golden Cars program would spare the state the expense of buying new cars right away. The state would pass on those savings to the agencies through lower rates for older cars — about 40 percent less than what they pay now.

The state has a computerized system that tracks the history of every vehicle it cares for. If the car is breaking down a lot, it will be pulled from the program.

Gov. Mark Sanford's Management, Accountability and Performance Commission recommended the change

as part of its 190-page study on cutting waste in state government.

The commission projects the size of the fleet would shrink gradually as the state bought fewer vehicles — from 14,000 vehicles to 13,000 or so, with a one-time savings of \$16 million. The commission also projects annual savings — \$2.5 million — from extending the life cycle of the cars.

The Budget and Control Board already had been considering such a program, spokesman Mike Sponhour said.

"Just like families gotta drive cars a little longer because they don't have enough money to buy a new one," Sponhour said, "we're making the same system available to state agencies."

State Rep. Leon Howard, D-Richland, was a member of the MAP Commission committee that studied transportation. He has been helping fix cars for 20 years at his family's garage.

He wants to be sure agencies use the program wisely.

"If you've got some executive or some director who doesn't travel much, driving big Crown Vics that go to Wildewood or Lake Carolina, they're not responsible for traveling some extended period," Howard said. "Why not give the working folks the more dependable vehicles?"

Policies vary from agency to agency, Sponhour said.

Agencies decide what vehicles they need, when they need them and who is going to drive them.

Howard said he hopes agencies will designate older cars for in-town driving and newer cars for field work.

Overall, he said the program is needed.

"We're in a bad financial situation. We're trying to make the best of it."

Reach Bauerlein at (803) 771-8485 or vbauerlein@thestate.com



Posted on Mon, Dec. 01, 2003

State mechanic keeps fleet on job, on road

Good records, preventive maintenance are Golden Rules

By VALERIE BAUERLEIN
Staff Writer

So just who will keep the Golden Cars purring past 100,000 miles?

Guys like Jay Manis, one of four mechanics with the state fleet office.

Manis, 34, says the key is keeping good records — from what repairs have been made to when tires have been changed. The state tracks each vehicle's history through a central database.

Manis also preaches preventive maintenance, from oil to filters to fluids.

He is a master technician, certified in eight separate areas by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. It is a rare designation, achieved by a fraction of mechanics.

Some specialize in brakes or transmissions, but Manis says he is a "bumper-to-bumper" man.

He grew up mechanically minded, he says. "I was always subject to tearing things up and putting them back together."

He figures he came by his work honestly. His father was a mechanic and his mother was a competitive driver — a figure-eight demolition-derby driver, to be exact.

Manis and his wife, Margie, live with their two children in Monticello in Fairfield County, a 35-mile commute to downtown Columbia.

But Manis says he doesn't sweat the drive because he treats his own car — Buick Century, 130,000 miles — and his wife's — Toyota Celica, 330,000 miles — with the same care as those at work.

"I don't mind driving something old, because I know it's been taken care of," he says.

His boss, Gerry Calk, says Manis is special because he studies a car before he starts working on it.

"He thinks his way through," Calk said. "We don't wind up just throwing parts at a problem."

Manis says when he does start work, he gets absorbed, up to his elbows and beyond.

"I'm not scared to get dirty because I'll get clean eventually."

Reach Bauerlein at (803) 771-8485 or vbauerlein@thestate.com



Posted on Mon, Dec. 01, 2003



Putting court records on line should aid justice

IN GREENVILLE COUNTY, magistrates who once had to rely on a spotty paper system can now check their computer when a bad-check writer stands before them, and find out whether the offender has faced these charges before, and thus determine both what the crime and what the sentence should be.

Instead of creating a new record at each step as a rape case moves from police to jail to solicitor to court, officials in those offices can now call up the one record on the defendant and add the latest information to it.

When the solicitor drops the charges against an accused thief, the record is automatically available to the jail, so the prisoner can be released instead of having to wait for paper documents to move from office to office.

And by January, anyone in the world can peruse these public records from the comfort of their desktop.

Greenville is just the start. Richland and Pickens counties will be rolling out their own electronic case management systems over the next few months. And the rest of the state is expected to follow.

It's all part of an admirable effort Chief Justice Jean Toal has undertaken to open up our criminal justice system — despite the lack of funds, despite courts' traditional reluctance to embrace innovation, despite being part of a state that has never placed a high priority on spending money up-front for long-term payoffs, or on making information readily available to the public.

Justice Toal's priority with the new system, which she built with federal grants and unveiled last month, is to make her courts more efficient, on two levels.

First, there's financial efficiency — an increasingly important goal as state funds dwindle while the court's workload increases. In Greenville County, for instance, as many as 24 separate records were created for each case, and housed in up to 24 separate databases; this system slashes data entry time.

Perhaps more important is judicial efficiency. Less data entry means less chance for error. A single record on each case means crucial steps — which can determine whether a case is successfully prosecuted — are less likely to be missed. It means crucial information is less likely to be lost or overlooked.

All of this is important to the public, because it's in everybody's interest for the guilty to be found guilty and appropriately sentenced, the innocent to be found innocent and the entire process to move forward as quickly as possible. But what's likely to be of most direct interest to the public is the online aspect of the system, which will allow us to easily locate the information we have traditionally had to trudge to the police department or the jail or the court (or multiple courts) to track down. That means victims in criminal cases as well as plaintiffs and defendants in civil cases can easily keep up with their cases. It means the public in general can more easily find out about important (or just plain interesting) civil cases

and, more importantly, monitor the job the criminal justice system is doing.

Because they deal with so much information about individuals, the courts have been slower than much of government to make information easily available to the public. Those that are moving in that direction sometimes are reluctant to stay true to public access; federal officials, for instance, have rolled out a plan to redact a great deal of public information from court documents before they put them online. We commend Justice Toal for rejecting such limits and for going out of her way to be among the nation's leaders in the effort to catch our court system up with the information age.

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